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ABSTRACT

This report on the educational needs of homeless children was prepared in compliance with Title VII-B of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. Surveys were carried out to determine the number and location of homeless students in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and to assess their unique educational needs as the basis for formulating a state plan as required by the legislation. The report is divided into five sections. Section 1 is an introduction. Section 2 describes the methods used in data collection, summarizes data from local education agencies (LEAs), shelters, hotels/motels, and Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, determines the total number of homeless students in Massachusetts, compares replies from the three surveyed sources, and presents data from interviews with homeless families. A total of 278 (92 percent) school districts responded, but only one-fifth of these reported being aware of homeless students in their district. Districts reported a total of 967 homeless children, the majority of whom were elementary school students. Section 3 analyzes the barriers homeless children face in receiving educational services in Massachusetts. Section 4 presents recommendations for alleviating these barriers. Recommendations are made in the following areas: (1) transportation; (2) transfer of student records; (3) interagency collaboration; (4) dissemination of information; and (5) inservice training for school and shelter personnel. Section 5 consists of appendixes containing the survey instruments and a glossary of terms. Data are presented on 10 tables and figures. (BJV)

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Report on the Education of Homeless Children in Massachusetts

December 1988

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Report on the Education of Homeless Children in Massachusetts

December 1988

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INTRODUCTION

A.) Background Information

In July 1987 the United States Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77) - an omnibus legislation which provides assistance to homeless persons. Part of this bill directly addresses the educational needs of homeless children and youth* (Title VII, subtitle B). In accordance with this section of the McKinney Act all States that apply for this grant must fulfill the following requirements:

1.) each state will ensure that every homeless child will receive educational services comparable to those provided to any other child who is a resident of that state;

2.) if the residency requirements of any state prohibit homeless children from receiving a full and appropriate public education these requirements should be reviewed and revised;

3.) an Office of Coordinator of Education of Homeless Children and Youth will be established in each state; this Office will be responsible for annually collecting data on the status of homeless school-age children within the state, reporting the results of this data collection to tne United States Department of Education by December 31 of each year, and formulating and implementing a state plan to meet the educational needs of homeless students.

In compliance with these federal regulations the Massachusetts Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth collected information in October 1988 on the number and location of homeless students and their unique educational needs. The following report is a compilation and analysis of this data.

B.) Format of Report

Following the introduction, this report is organized as follows:

Section II: Methods used in data collection, summary of data from local education agencies (LEAs), shelters and hotels/motels, and Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare, total number of homeless students in Massachusetts, comparison of replies from the three surveyed sources, and information from interviews with homeless families;

Section III: Existing barriers homeless children face in receiving educational services in Massachusetts;

Section IV: Recommendations for alleviating these existing barriers, and,

Section V: An appendix containing glossary of terms and survey forms used.

*See Appendix A for definition.

C.) Limitations of Report

Readers should bear in mind that the following factors could affect the reliability and accuracy of data presented in this report:

- not all of the LEAs, shelters or personnel working with the hotel/motel population responded to the survey, and not all of the questions were answered by those who did respond;

- the transient nature of homeless families makes it difficult to obtain accurate information on their location, number, etc.

- the numbers presented in this report do not include the homeless who are not part of the shelter system; therefore, homeless families and youth who are living on the street, in cars, etc. are not included in the data.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Methodology

The core of information upon which this report is based came from the results of surveys sent to the following Massachusetts agencies: local education agencies, all family, battered women, and adolescent shelters, all transitional houses, and all motels/hotels housing homeless families. The survey forms for the hotel/motel population were sent to Massachusetts Department of Social Service (DSS) workers and community action committees who are involved with this population. (See Appendix B for survey forms.) It was requested that data be recorded for the day of October 20,1988 only to reduce duplication of count. A second form was mailed in early November to those recipients of the survey who had not responded by the end of October. Those shelters and school districts who had not responded by December 1 were contacted by telephone; through these calls additional data on the number of homeless school-age children in shelters and schools was acquired, even though responses to all the questions on the survey form were not answered over the telephone. Written responses were received from a total of 278 school districts (92%), 97 shelters (60%) and 58 motels/hotels (62%). In a final analysis, using information provided by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) and information from the follow-up calls, data was collected for 89% of the family shelters, 100% of the hotels/motels, 71% of the battered women shelters, 83% of the adolescent shelters, 40% of the individual shelters, 100% of the transitional houses, and 92% of the school districts. To provide a comprehensive picture of the school-age homeless population data was estimated to account for those shelters who did not reply. This information is delineated in Section IIID.

In addition to the quantitative data mentioned above, qualitative data was collected through interviews with four homeless families. A protocol formulated by the Human Services Development Institute (University of Southern Maine) was used for the interviews. (See Appendix C for selected pages of these interview forms.) The interviews parallel those done in other four other New England states (Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Rhode Island) as part of a collaborative effort to study the needs of homeless families in the New England area.

B. Summary of School District Data

Data collected from school districts are summarized in Figures 1 and 2. A total of 278 (92%) school districts responded but only one-fifth of these reported being aware of homeless students in their schools. Districts reported a total of 967 homeless children, the majority of whom were elementary students. This includes 32 homeless children enrolled in early childhood programs and 97 children who are living in a "doubled-up"* situation. Boston, Salisbury Union #68, Lynn and Springfield reported the largest homeless student populations. Table 1 lists the 10 districts reporting the greatest number of homeless students.

Figure 1

Response of Local Education Agencies to Homeless Survey By Number and Percent

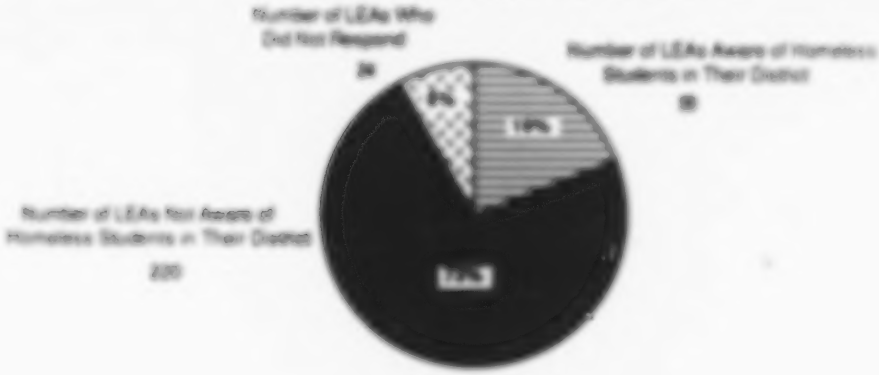
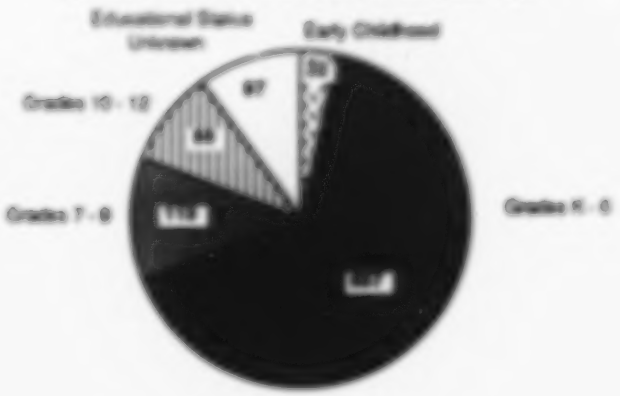

Number of LEAs Who Did Not Respond
24
Number of LEAs Aware of Homeless Students in Their District
Number of LEAs Not Aware of Homeless Students in Their District
220

Figure 2

Number of Homeless Children By Grade Level (Reported by LEAs)
Total Number of Homeless Children= 967



*See Appendix A for definition.

Table I

Districts Reporting Greatest Number of Homeless Students

School District	Number of Homeless Students
Boston	138
Salisbury Union #68	106*
Lynn	80
Springfield	79
Framingham	46*
Barnstable	36*
Brockton	34
Worcester	27
West Springfield	27
Revere	23

*Includes doubled-up children.

Homeless Students Attending School Outside Local District

Of the 967 homeless students reported 26 (3%) were living in one district and attending school in another district. This included nine students receiving special education services. Of these homeless children crossing district lines 11 received transportation to/from school by either district. The approximate daily cost to districts for all of their homeless students crossing district lines was $35.00 for transportation and $18.20 for education.

Average Length of Stay

The average length of stay of a homeless student in a district was ten weeks. Only 34 school districts provided data on the number of homeless students who had been enrolled in one or more other school districts since the beginning of the school year. They reported that 56 (22%) of their students had been enrolled in one other district and 14 (6%) had been enrolled in two other districts.

Rates of Absenteeism and Academic Performance

Fifty-three percent of the responding school districts reported the rate of absenteeism of homeless students was equal to that of the average students in the district; 24% reported the rate was higher and 10% reported the rate was lower.

Forty-seven percent of the responding school districts reported the academic performance of homeless students was lower than that of the average student in the district; 35% reported academic performance as equal to that of other students and 2% reported academic performance as higher.

Tutors

Twenty percent of the responding LEA's reported they do provide tutors for non-756* students with a total of 23 tutors involved.

*See Appendix A for definition.

Problems Enrolling Homeless Children

The following table shows what problems school districts are encountering in enrolling homeless children in school. The left-hand column shows the problems listed in the survey. The other two columns show how many school districts checked this as a problem and the average rating for the problem. (A scale of 0 to 3 was used for the ratings with 0 = not a problem, 1 = occasionally a problem, 2 = frequently a problem and 3 = constantly a problem.)

Table 2

Problems School Districts Encountered Enrolling Homeless Students In School

Description of Problem	Number of replies	Average Rating
Transportation Within District	15	1.21
Transportation Outside District	6	1.80
Other Transportation	6	2.00
Record Transfer	29	1.64
Knowledge That Homeless Are Attending	29	1.62
Collaboration With Other Agencies	20	1.63
Other	9	2.10

The "Other" problems encountered by school districts in enrolling homeless children include: difficulty in contacting/communicating with parents of homeless students, the excessive expense involved, and communicating with bilingual parents and handling bilingual records.

Unique Educational Needs

A majority of the responding school districts perceived establishing continuity and stability in an educational program to be a unique educational need of homeless children. Other needs mentioned by school personnel included:

- instructional staff's awareness/sensitivity to needs of homeless children
- counseling, follow-up and tracking
- transportation to/from school
- presentation of school as a warm, friendly, safe place
- need for schools and other service agencies to stress the value of education to homeless students

C. Summary of Shelter and Motel/Hotel Data

Shelters and personnel working with the hotel/motel population reported a total of 2075 homeless children between the ages of 0 and 22 years. Approximately 1330 of these are of school age (5 - 17 years). This includes the reported "doubled-up" population of 555 school-age children. Figure 3 shows the total number of reported homeless children broken down into age categories; Figure 4 depicts the educational status of the school-age population. In these Figures the categories labeled "Educational Placement Unknown" and "Unknown" represent mostly children living in a doubled-up situation for which shelters and motel social workers have no information in regard to their school placement or age.

Figure 3

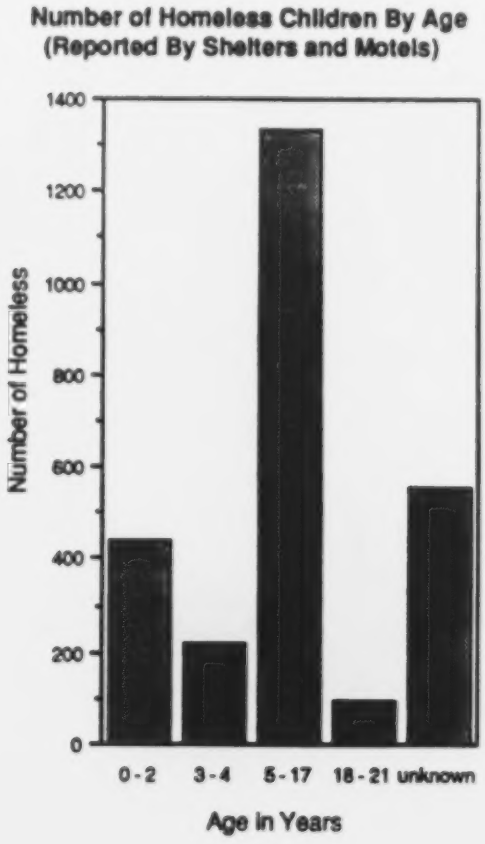
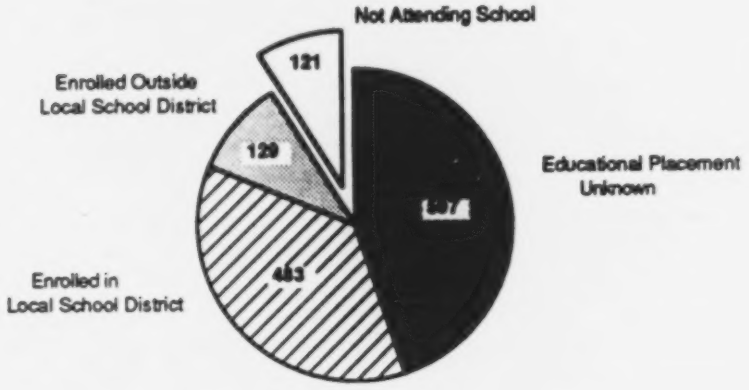


Figure 4

Educational Placement of Homeless Children (Reported By Shelters/Motels) Total Number of Homeless Children = 1330



Reasons Children Are Not Attending School

The shelter/motel personnel checked the "Other" category as the major reason children were not attending school. Fifty-one of the respondents checked this. The reasons listed under "Other" included: the limited stay in an adolescent shelter coupled with delays in record transfer makes it impossible to establish a school program, record transfer for out-of-state arrivals is a problem, fear that abuser of children from domestic violence situations will locate the children in school, waiting for special education plans from a previous school, mothers' refusal to enroll children (for various reasons), low priority of education for families in a crisis situation, teenage heads-of-household cannot attend school because they lack day care facilities for their children. Nineteen respondents checked transportation as another reason children were not attending school, 18 checked record transfer, eight checked that the students had been expelled or suspended, and four checked that students had been denied admission by the school. It should be noted that 36 of the 121 homeless students not attending school were legal dropouts (over 16).

Transportation

Regarding transportation for children who attend school within a local district, the majority of replies indicate that children use a school bus to get to school. For children attending school outside the local district parents usually provide transportation to/from school. Only 12 shelters/motels reported that they or the families they house receive funding for transporting children to/from school. This money was received from either the school district, Massachusetts Departments of Mental Health, Social Services or Public Welfare.

Average Length of Stay

The average length of stay for a family in a shelter was reported as ten weeks with approximately 88% of these families having never been in a shelter before. For families living in motels/hotels the average length of stay in the motel/hotel was reported as ten weeks with 51% of these families having never been in a motel/hotel before.

Services Provided, Children in Custody of the State

Sixty-three percent of the shelters reported they provide high school equivalency (GED) courses, 79% reported they provide counseling services, and 51% reported they provide tutors. (73% of these tutors were paid for by the schools and 27% were paid for by the shelters.) The hotel/motel personnel replied that 40% of their facilities provided access to high school equivalency programs, 38% provided access to counseling, and 10% provided access to tutors (paid for by school district). Only 39 children/youth in the shelters/motels were in permanent custody of the State and in such cases either the DSS worker, the person of custody, the school district, or the parents in conjunction with DSS decided where the children/youth would go to school.

Numbers Unable to House; Numbers of Doubled-Up Children

Shelters/motels reported that they were unable to house approximately 190 school-age children who were referred to their facility on October 20,1988. They reported knowing of 555 school-age children living in a doubled-up situation.

Problems Enrolling Homeless Children in School

The following table shows what problems shelters/motels are encountering in enrolling homeless children in school. The left-hand column shows the problems listed in the survey. The other two columns show how many shelters/motels checked this as a problem and the average rating for the problem. (A scale of 0 to 3 was used for the ratings with 0 = never a problem, 1 = occasionally a problem, 2 = frequently a problem, and 3 = constantly a problem.)

Table 3

Problems Shelters/Motels Encountered Enrolling Homeless Students In School

Description of Problem	Number of Replies	Average Rating
Transportation Within District	37	1.62
Transportation Outside District	60	2.40
Other Transportation	12	2.35
Record Transfer	63	1.54
Inter-agency Collaboration	30	1.46
Other	19	2.04

The "Other" problems encountered by shelters and hotels/motels in enrolling homeless children include: school-related material not getting to parents, embarrassment of junior high students on their first day in a new school, required immunizations not up-to-date or completed, obtaining necessary paperwork from parents, record transfer for out-of-state students, and schools' reluctance to accept children on a temporary basis.

Unique Educational Needs

The shelter/motel staff responding to the question of perceived unique educational needs of homeless children provided in-depth replies. A majority of the respondents named the following :

- need for school to provide security and support
- need for counseling (for adjustment and emotional issues)
- need for consistency in an educational program that is structured with a definite daily routine
- need for small classes with an opportunity for one-on-one instruction
- need for tutors in the shelters
- need for sensitivity on the part of school personnel
- need for transportation to/from school

It is interesting to note that most of these perceived needs of homeless children are relational in nature (i.e., they refer to what children need on an emotional/social level in the school system). Some purely academic needs shelter/motel personnel mentioned include:

- need for health education
- need to teach independent living skills
- need to help children structure time and use educational resources
- need of a time/place to do homework
- need for after-school programs/ after-school tutors
- need for more preschool/Head Start programs

D. Total Number of School-Age Homeless Children in Massachusetts

In an attempt to present a complete picture of the homeless school-age population in Massachusetts additional data was used to supplement the information received from the returned surveys. Statistics from the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare (DPW) for a majority of the family shelters and all of the hotels/motels housing homeless families, information from follow-up calls, and estimated data for those shelters who had not responded were added to the survey information. The following Tables delineate the information used and the total number of homeless school-age children in the Commonwealth.

Table 4

Data From Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare and Shelters Regarding Number of Homeless School-Age Children

Data Source	Grade Level K-6	7-9	10-12	% Reporting
Family Shelters:				
DPW data	213	47	38	
Other	73	20	5	89%
DPW (Hotels/Motels)	385	115	83	100%
Battered Women Shelters	58	12	4	71%
Adolescent Shelters	15	52	84	83%
Individual Shelters	0	0	3	41%
Transitional Houses	10	2	16	100%
TOTALS	754	248	233	

Table 5

Estimated Number of Homeless Children From Shelters Not Responding

Data Source	Percent Not Responding	Estimated Data Of Non-Respondents*
Family Shelters	11%	K - 6 = 35 7 - 9 = 8 10-12 = 5
Battered Women Shelters	29%	K - 6 = 24 7 - 9 = 5 10-12 = 2
Adolescent Shelters	17%	K - 6 = 3 7 - 9 = 11 10-12 = 17
Individual Shelters	59%	10-12 = 4
TOTALS		K - 6 = 62 7 - 9 = 24 10-12 = 28

114

*See Appendix D for mathematical computations of estimated data.

A compilation of all the data indicates that there are approximately 1904 homeless school-age children in Massachusetts:

Survey data + DPW data (Table 4)	=	1235
Doubled-up population	=	555
Estimated data (Table 5)	=	114
TOTAL		1904

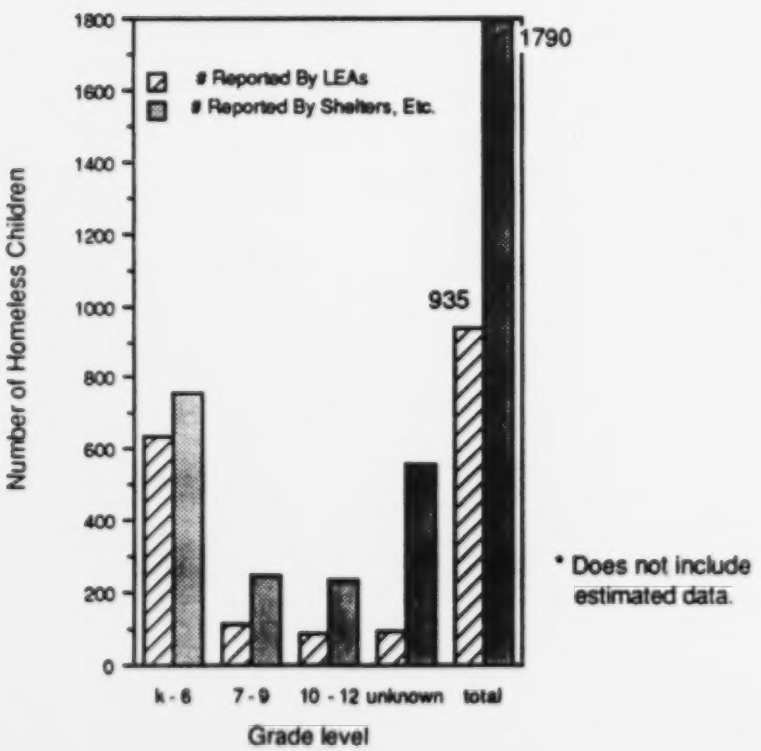
E. Comparison of School District Data with Shelter/Motel Data

Totals

Figure 5 shows a comparison of the data reported by the school districts with that reported by shelters, hotels and DPW. The striped bars indicate the number of homeless students reported by school districts on October 20, 1988 and the shaded bars represent the number of homeless school-age students reported by shelters, hotels and DPW on the same date. The bar representing the total figure reported by the shelters does not include the estimated data for those shelters that did not reply. Also, it is important to note that the figures for the shelter data includes those 121 children who were not in school on October 20 even though they were of school age.

Figure 5

Homeless Children: Report From LEAs Compared to Report From Shelters, Motels and DPW *



Crossing District Lines

Shelters/motels reported that 128 homeless children were attending school outside their local district; school districts were aware of only 22 homeless students attending school in their district while living in another.

Problems in Enrolling Homeless Children

In comparing replies from school districts to those from shelters/motels on the question of problems encountered in enrolling homeless children in school it is interesting to note the following:

- both constituents checked "Record Transfer" most frequently (63 shelters/motels checked this as did 29 school districts);
- the highest average rating (indicating the most problematic area) from the shelter motel surveys was "Transportation Outside the District" with a rating of 2.40, while the highest rating from the school districts was "Other"(e.g., difficulty contacting or communicating with parents of homeless students, excessive expense, bilingual parents and records) with a rating of 2.10; school districts did not view transportation outside the district as a problem and only 15 of the 52 responding districts listed any form of transportation as a problem.
- overall, taking into account both the number of replies and average rating, the greatest problem that school districts had in enrolling homeless children in school was "Records Transfer" while for the shelters/motels it was "Transportation Outside the District".

Educational Needs

Both school personnel and shelter/motel providers named **continuity in an educational program** and **transportation** as major educational needs of homeless children. Other needs mentioned by both school districts and shelters include the need for the school to be seen as a safe, friendly, supportive place with personnel who are sensitive to the unique needs of homeless students, and the need for counseling and other support services.

F. Qualitative Data

In addition to compiling statistics on the numbers of homeless children (quantitative data) it is important to hear homeless families themselves describe their experiences (qualitative data) with the educational system. To present this perspective four homeless families (one parent and one child from each family) were interviwed using an in-depth format created by staff at the University of Southern Maine. Following are the results of these interviews.

1. Child Interviews

- The children/youth interviewed were in the fifth, ninth, and tenth grade four had been to school on the day of the interview and the one who hadn't was an adolescent who hadn't been to school in two months.

•All of the children/youth wanted to continue going to school because it was "fun" and they wanted to learn. All but one viewed their teachers as nice people who helped a lot and who "don't take things out on the kids".

•Two of the four children stated that it was not hard to complete their schoolwork while the other two said it was "very hard" to get it done, even though all four viewed school as easy.

•When asked where they would do their homework in the shelter three replied they would try to do it in their room while one replied she would do it at the shelter director's desk if possible.

•All of the interviewees stated they had "a lot" of friends at school and in other places. Three said the other children at school did not know that they needed a place to live; the one who said her friends did know had told them herself that she was living in a shelter.

•The things the children/youth liked about staying in the shelter included:

-"We do a lot of things; they try to help us with our problems; nobody here can hate you; they wouldn't bite off your head if you make a mistake."
-"When the kids come home and we all go upstairs and play games or watch TV together."
-"You get to go places and play."
-"nothing"

•The things the children/youth did not like about staying in the shelter included:

-"the building"
-"I don't think I hate anything about here."
-"the rules and the cook; I hate the food."
-"nothing"
-"The rules are strict and they don't make any sense."

If the children/youth had a choice to go to school in the shelter or in a regular school all four said they would want to attend a regular school because:

"There's alot of kids there and I still have to make friends."
"If I try to do my work here (in the shelter) they tell me the answers and I'm not learning, but the teachers in school can help me during study hall or something."
"It's fun."

When asked if the school could do something to help them or their families the children/youth replied:
"Give me all the classrooms for my house."
"Let me go to school while I am here; I've already missed some months."
"Maybe find us a home, a house; maybe donate some money."
"Help with my reading."

2. Parent Interviews

•Of the four parents interviewed two were in their thirties and two were in their forties; two had husbands who were living with them in the shelter, one had two children (ages 2 and 7 years) with her in the shelter, one had three children (ages 11, 12 and 15 years) with her in the shelter, one had four children (ages 6, 8, 11, and 12 years) with her in the shelter, and one had five children (ages 5, 11, 12, 14, and 16 years) with her in the shelter. All four women had other children who were living elsewhere. The women, on the average, were 18 years old when they had their first child. Two of the women had completed high school and two had completed the tenth grade. All of the women expressed an interest in continuing their education and a couple had already started to attend local colleges.
•The majority of these families had been looking for three months for a permanent place to live.

•All of these mothers reported that their children attend school five days per week. One mother reported that her child was kept out of school for three weeks while waiting for school records to be transferred from another school in Massachusetts. Three of the mothers reported their children take a school bus to school while a fourth mother reported her children were transported to and from school by her husband.

•When asked if their children talk to them about school (teachers, classmates, schoolwork) three mothers replied their children like their teachers; one mother replied that she does see her daughter's schoolwork and that her daughter shows it to her because she feels good about how she is doing in her subjects. The others replied they don't hear much from their children about schoolwork. Two mothers replied that their children do not talk to them about their classmates while two mothers replied that their children had positive comments about their classmates. Three of the four mothers replied their children do not have trouble keeping up with their schoolwork while one replied she had one child who was having trouble. All four mothers stated that at least one of their children had repeated a grade and two mothers had children who had been suspended from school.

•When asked how staying in a shelter would affect their children's performance in school the parents replied:
"The kids aren't too thrilled about letting anyone know (that they are staying in the shelter), but it shouldn't affect them too much."
"A lot, it's already affecting their school grades; they're not adjusting.
"I don't think it did affect them; they're uncomfortable here but it won't affect their schoolwork."
"None, because I spend time with them."

•When asked if the school could do something to help their children improve their schoolwork the parents replied:
"They're already improving (in helping my son.)"
"It might be better if they keep P. after school to make her do her homework better. When she gets here (the shelter) she won't do her homework."
"If they're weak in a subject they could give them after-school lessons."

III. BARRIERS

From the data described in the first section of this report it is possible to delineate at least three obstacles homeless children face as they try to enroll in or remain in school:

A) Transportation
B) Transfer of Student Records
C) Collaboration Between Agencies

A.) Transportation

There are two existing scenarios which present transportation problems for homeless students:

- A child is attending school in District A, becomes homeless and is moved to a shelter in District B. The parents make the decision that the child will continue going to school in District A. The school districts support the parents decision but are not able to provide transportation from the shelter back to the school in District A.

- A child is attending School A, becomes homeless and is moved to a shelter within the same school district but closer to School B. The parents make the decision that the child will continue going to School A. The school district supports the parents decision but cannot provide transportation from the shelter to School A.

In both of these situations the continuity of the child's education is preserved if the parents can find some means of transporting their child to/from school. If the family is eligible for Emergency Assistance (EA) benefits through the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), they are eligible to receive reimbursement of up to $10.00 per day for transportation expenses. (This maximum also applies to all the family's housing-search related transportation expenses and for transportation to medical appointments if not covered by another source and can only be used for inter-district transportation for children to/from school.) Unfortunately, these funds are available only on a reimbursement basis (i.e., the parents pay for their transportation costs then submit a written statement, signed by their housing search worker, of the incurred cost which is then submitted to the welfare department for processing.). Also, these EA funds, when they are utilized, do not always cover the total cost of transporting several children to/from school.

8) Transfer of Student Records

A second barrier that homeless children face as they attempt to enroll in school is that of record transfer. The traditional requirements that a child's academic, immunization, and other pertinent records (e.g., Individualized Educational Plan - IEP) be presented to the new school upon enrollment creates a problem for homeless families. These families may have to withdraw their children from school unexpectedly if they lose their place of residence. Homeless families may also be experiencing other crises that require immediate attention (e.g., finding food, shelter, medical care) thus the parents' focus is not on getting the necessary records before their children are withdrawn from school. These children may wait up to a month before the records arrive from the previous school and are allowed to start attending the new school; each successive move may leave the children further and further behind academically as they wait for records to catch up. Homeless children arriving from another state experience even greater difficulty in this area as it takes more time for their school records to arrive; other states may also have different procedures for record transfer.

Homeless children with special needs often face a double-barrier related to transfer of school records; in addition to the requirement that their immunization records be on-hand at the school, they have to wait for their previous educational plans to arrive. Some shelters reported that children in their facilities were not allowed to start school until the child's education plan had arrived at the new school. Thus a child with special needs, for whom it is extremely important to have continuity in an educational program, may wait weeks to be re-enrolled in school.

Homeless adolescents face another obstacle as they may be required to have a physical examination before entering school. Parents do not always have the means to transport their child to a doctor or clinic where this can be done.

Some of the responding school districts noted that it is often difficult to contact or communicate with parents of homeless students. This lack of communication may delay the enrollment process. Also, if a bilingual family enters a school system that does not have a bilingual program the transfer of and interpretation of those records may cause further delays in the child's enrollment.

C.) Collaboration Between Agencies

Homeless families and their children face a third barrier as they try to access available educational services. A lack of interagency collaboration may lead to either the children not receiving the full range of educational services to which they are entitled or to their being delayed in starting school. The key agencies named by school districts and shelters in the survey are the local educational agencies, and the Massachusetts Departments of Public Welfare (local offices) and the of Social Services (local offices).

One consequence created by a lack of communication between these agencies is that of school districts not being aware that homeless families with school-age children are living within their district or that housing facilities for homeless families exist within their area. As the system now operates, DPW places homeless families in shelters, and, as a last resort, in hotels/motels. Before the family is placed local office staff explain and ask the family to sign a contract between the family and the department. This contract includes a release to share information with other public or private agencies, including DSS and educational authorities, in order to, among other things, assist the family in "ensuring the delivery of educational services to (their) children". For clients who are placed in hotels/motels the contract also informs the clients that a notification of their placement will be sent to DSS so that DSS can offer them services. These services often include assisting with the children's school arrangements. However, if a client specifically objects to sharing information with DSS or any other specific agency, DPW will honor this preference and a notification will not be sent. In addition, it is up to the family to accept or deny services from DSS.

Generally, there is no direct contact between the local DPW office and the local school system, although in some areas of Massachusetts individual school districts have created an informal working agreement with local DPW offices which allows for a more coordinated and comprehensive effort to serve these families while preserving their confidentiality. In Brockton a guidance counselor with the Brockton public schools serves as a liaison between the school district and homeless families who are living in shelters and hotels/motels. This liaison meets bi-weekly with a team of representatives from local service agencies (including DSS and DPW) to discuss needed services for the homeless families in the area. For two years this position was funded by the Horace Mann grant. In Worcester a Task Force on Homeless Children was established by the Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. The creation of this task force has led to a strong collaboration between shelter providers, local service agencies and the Worcester public schools. The Community Action Council, Inc. is now seeking funding to hire a coordinator who would act as a liaison between the local schools, shelters, service agencies and other involved parties.

The fact that some school districts are not aware that homeless children are attending their schools has both positive and negative implications. If school districts are not aware that homeless children are attending schools in their area it may indicate the confidentiality of these families is being respected. Many homeless families do not want others to know they do not have a permanent place to live. Conversely, if school district personnel are not aware that homeless families with school-age children are living in their district, and if these families choose not to access DSS services and do not know the procedures for enrolling their children in school, the children may miss valuable school time as their parents try to grapple with the situation alone.

Children who are living in shelters have an advantage over children living in hotels/motels in that shelter personnel know the procedures for enrolling a child in school and can aid the parents in the process. Even so, if direct contact between the shelters and the schools does not exist children may experience difficulty as they start in the new school and they may suffer if there is no collaborative problem-solving between the school and the shelter.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A requirement of the federal McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is that "Each State shall adopt a plan to provide for the education of each homeless child or homeless youth within the State . . ." [Subtitle B, Sec.722,(e)(1)]. In order to comply with this federal mandate the Massachusetts Department of Education has formed a Homeless Advisory Committee which is in the process of drafting such a plan. Based on the information contained within this report, it is recommended that this Committee address the following issues as they compose the State Plan:

1.) TRANSPORTATION

It is necessary to determine a system which will provide transportation to all school-age homeless children; all possible options should be considered as the committee addresses this particular problem. Viable options should include: continued support for the bill filed with the Massachusetts Legislature in November 1988 by the Massachusetts Board of Education which would allow school districts to be reimbursed by the State for transporting homeless students across district lines; working with local school districts to set up procedures to transport homeless students who need transportation within their own district; looking at other sources of money (DPW Emergency Assistance Transportation Funds, DSS Homeless Children's Funds, Office for Children emergency funds, and private sponsors) that may be applied toward transportation costs of homeless children to/from school; work with community action agencies to collaboratively address this problem in each community.

2.) TRANSFER OF STUDENT RECORDS

The Committee should explore ways that the traditional record transfer system can be expedited to decrease the amount of time homeless children spend waiting to start school. Issues such as record transfer by telephone, ensuring that homeless families and their advocates are familiar with the record transfer system and their rights regarding access to school records by providing them with copies of the Student Records Regulations, and having local educational agencies name a homeless liaison who can help with the transfer of records should be considered. It should be emphasized that school-age children are entitled to start receiving educational services immediately upon registration, the only exception being the case where the child has not been immunized.

3.) INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

A collaborative effort must be undertaken by the major agencies that serve homeless school-age children; the Homeless Advisory Committee should propose ways that these agencies can work together to ensure that each homeless child will receive all the educational services to which he/she is entitled. Specific ways in which all involved agencies (Department of Education, Department of Public Welfare, Department of Social Services, local community action agencies, housing corporations, shelters, Office for Children, etc.) can cooperate in this endeavor should be formulated.

4.) DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

A process for the dissemination of information pertinent to the education of homeless children should be specified. Information that would be valuable to parents of homeless children, homeless youths themselves, shelter providers, personnel working with homeless families and school districts would include: the State Plan drafted by the Committee, any information from the Massachusetts Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, programs that are being attempted in various school districts that focus specifically on homeless children, pertinent information from DPW (shelter and motel/hotel names and locations) and DSS.

5.) INSERVICE TRAINING FOR SCHOOL AND SHELTER PERSONNEL

In order to raise the awareness level of school personnel it is recommended that inservice training take place for school district employees who are in direct contact with homeless children. This should include bus drivers, nurses, teachers, counselors, secretaries, special education directors, and administrators. A collaborative effort between local service agencies, local education agencies and the Massachusetts Department of Education should be undertaken to design programs which contain information about the homeless situation on the local, state and national levels. Such inservice training should delineate the unique needs of homeless students and suggest ways that school personnel can effectively meet the educational needs of this population.

APPENDIX A

Definitions

homeless: A homeless individual is one who (1) lacks a fixed, regular and adequate residence or (2) has a primary nighttime residence in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accomodation for human beings.

child/youth: Persons who, if they were children of residents of the State, would be entitled to a free public education.

doubled-up: Families/individuals who are living with another family(ies) temporarily until they are able to find or afford their own living quarters.

766: Massachusetts Chapter 766 of the Acts of 1972 which serves to provide for a flexible and uniform system of special education opportunities for all children requiring special education.

APPENDIX B

Survey Form Sent to School Superintendents

School District: _____

District Contact Person for Homeless Youth (if identified):

Name _____
Address _____
Title _____
Telephone Number (___) _____

To the best of your knowledge, are there any students who meet the definition of "homeless" (see below) enrolled in your district?

"A homeless individual is one who (1) lacks a fixed, regular and adequate residence or (2) has a primary nighttime residence in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter for temporary accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill), an institution providing temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings." (McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, Section 103(a)(1)(2))

_____No If no, please return this form to the address listed below.

_____Yes If yes, please provide the following information regarding homeless children attending schools within your district and return this form to the address listed below by October 28, 1988. **For all items preceded by an asterisk (*) please give data for the day of October 20,1988 only.** This will help us to reduce duplication of our data.

*1.) On October 20,1988 how many homeless children attending school within your district were enrolled in:

Early Childhood Programs _____
Elementary (K-6) _____
Middle/Junior High (7-9) _____
High School (10-12) _____
Other (Please specify.) _____
_____
_____

*2.) Of the number listed above how many of these homeless students, enrolled in your district, were living outside your district boundaries? _____

a.) From what school districts did they come?

_____
_____
_____

b.) How many of these students receive special educational services? _____

Delineate these by prototype. (i.e. 6 students in 502.3)

_____ _____
_____ _____

c.) Are any of these out-of-district students receiving transportation services through your district?

_____No _____Yes How many?_____

d.) What is the approximate daily cost to your district for the educational & transportation needs of these out-of-district homeless students?

_____ transportation _____ education

3.) Since the beginning of this school year ('88-'89) how many of the homeless children presently enrolled in your district have been enrolled in:

one other district _____
two other districts _____
three or more other districts _____

4.) What is the average length of stay of homeless students in your district? _____ Weeks

5.) Is the rate of absenteeism of homeless students

higher than _____
equal to _____
lower than _____
that of the average student in your district?

6.) Is the academic performance of homeless students:

higher than _____
equal to _____
lower than _____
that of the average student in your district?

*7.) Are you aware of any homeless students living with friends or relatives? (This would include children of families who are living doubled-up.)

_____No _____Yes

If yes, how many school-aged children are involved? _____

*8.) Do you provide tutors for non-766 homeless children?

_____No _____Yes

If yes, how many tutors do you provide? _____

9.) What problems,if any, has your school district encountered in enrolling homeless children? Rate the following as to how much of a problem these are for your district. 0 = not a problem, 1 = occassionally a problem, 2 = frequently a problem, and 3 = constantly a problem

_____ Transportation arrangements for homeless students within your district boundaries

_____ Transportation arrangements for homeless students living outside your district boundaries

_____ Other transportation problems (Please list.)

_____

_____

_____

_____ Transfer of student records

_____ Knowledge that homeless students are attending school within your district

_____ Collaboration with other involved agencies (Please explain.)

_____

_____

_____ Other (Please explain.)

_____

_____

10.) What do you perceive as the unique <u>educational needs</u> of the homeless children enrolled in your district? (Use reverse side if needed).

Thank you for a prompt response to this survey. Please return by **<u>OCTOBER 28,1988</u>** to:

Michelle Fryt
Coordinator - Office for the Education of
Homeless Children and Youth
Massachusetts Department of Education
1385 Hancock Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 770-7549

Survey Form Sent to Shelter Directors

Name of Shelter: _____

Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Telephone No.: (_____) _____

Type of Shelter: _____Family _____Battered Women's

_____Adolescent _____Individual (specify men or women)

_____Other (Please specify.) _____

Check all types of funding received :*

_____ Private funds

_____ State funds

_____ Federal funds

Please provide the following information for the 24 hour period of October 20,1988 and return to the address below by OCTOBER 28,1988. For questions 1,2,3,4,5,8,10,and 11 please include data for the day of October 20,1988 only.

Return by October 28,1988 to: Michelle Fryt, Coordinator
Office for Education of Homeless Children and Youth
Massachusetts Dept of Education
1385 Hancock Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617)770-7549

*Information required by the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

1.) Please provide information about the number of children staying in your shelter in each age category below:

0 - 2 years: _____in your shelter (10/20/88)

3 - 4 years: _____in your shelter (10/20/88)
_____attending school in local district
_____attending school outside local district
_____enrolled (in any school) but not attending
_____not enrolled in any school
_____How many of these not enrolled would qualify, in your estimation, for special education services?
_____educational status unknown

5 -17 years: _____in your shelter (10/20/88)
_____attending school in local district
_____attending school outside local district
_____enrolled (in any school) but not attending
_____not enrolled in any school
_____How many of these not enrolled would qualify, in your estimation, for special education services?
_____educational status unknown

18 -21 years: _____in your shelter (10/20/88)
_____attending local school district
_____attending school outside local district
_____enrolled (in any school) but not attending
_____not enrolled in any school
_____How many of these not enrolled would qualify, in your estimation, for special education services?
_____educational status unknown

Only those students without a high school diploma/GED should be counted here

2.) Check the reasons children are not attending school (whether enrolled or not):

_____problems with transportation
_____within district transportation
_____out-of-district transportation
_____problems with record transfer
(Specify types of problems encountered.)
_____
_____
_____denied admission by specific school or district
_____suspended or expelled
_____other (Please explain.)
_____
_____
_____

3.) Of those children attending school within the local district (on 10/20/88) approximately how many use the following modes of transportation to get to/from school:

_____school bus
_____family provides transportation
_____shelter provides transportation
_____transportation unknown
_____walk
_____public transp. or taxi

4.) Of those children attending school outside the local district, (on 10/20/88) approximately how many use the following modes of transportation to get to/from school:

_____school bus
_____family provides transportation
_____shelter provides transportation
_____transportation unknown
_____walk
_____public transp. or taxi

5.) Are the families/youth in your shelter,or is the shelter itself, receiving any payment for the cost of transporting the children to/from school? If so, what is the source of these payments? What problems are encountered in receiving funds for transportation?

6.) What problems, if any, has your shelter encountered in enrolling homeless children in school? Use a scale from 0 to 3 (0 = not a problem, 1 = occasionally a problem, 2 = frequently a problem, 3 = constantly a problem) to rate the following:

_____Transportation arrangements for children attending school within the local district
_____Transportation arrangements for children attending school outside the local district
_____Other transportation problems (Please list.)
_____
_____
_____

_____Tansfer of student records.
_____Collaboration with other involved agencies. (Please explain.)
_____
_____

_____Other (Please explain.)
_____
_____

7.) What is the average length of stay of a family (or youth) in your shelter? Please estimate if not known. _____weeks

8.) How many of the families (or youth) in your shelter:
_____have never been in a shelter before?
_____have been in one shelter before? (yours or another)
_____have been in two or more shelters before?

9.) Please identify the educational services provided by or accesible to your shelter:
_____high school equivalency (GED)
_____counseling for children/adolescents
_____tutors
_____acquired through local school districts
_____hired by shelter
_____other (Please explain.)

10.) How many of the children/youth in your shelter are in permanent custody of the State? _____Who decides where they go to school? _____

11.) Approximately how many school-age children were referred to your shelter on 10/20/88 that you were unable to place in your facility? _____

12.) In addition to the homeless living in shelters there is also another group of homeless that is of interest to this survey: the "hidden homeless". These are families /individuals who are living doubled-up with another family(ies) temporarily until they are able to find or afford their own living quarters.

_____How many " doubled-up" families are you aware of?
_____How many school-age children are in these families?
_____Of those school-age children presently in your shelter how many have come from a "doubled-up" situation?
_____Of those school-age children presently in your shelter how many are planning to go into a "doubled-up" situation?

13.) What do you perceive to be the unique <u>educational needs</u> of the children in your shelter?

Thank you for your prompt reply to this survey. Please return by <u>OCTOBER 28,1988</u> to:

Michelle Fryt, Coordinator
Office for Education of Homeless Children
Massachusetts Department of Education
1385 Hancock Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617)770-7549

APPENDIX C

Sections of Forms Used to Interview Homeless Families*
Child Interview Form

Q14. Do other kids at school know you need a place to live?

YES	(69)1	
NO	2	GO
DK	8	TO
NA	9	Q15

Q15. How do you know they know? What do they say?

_____ __ __ (70-71)

_____

_____ __ __ (72-73)

_____

Q16. What do you like about staying here.

_____ __ __ (74-75)

_____

_____ __ __ (76-77)

_____

Q17. What don't you like about staying here?

_____ __ __ (78-79)

_____

_____

*Used with permission of University of Southern Maine, Human Services Development Institute

Parent Interview Form

Q28. (Has/Have) your child(ren) ever repeated a grade?

YES	(116) 1
NO	2
DK	8
NA	.9

Q29. (Has/Have) your child(ren) ever been suspended from school?

YES	(117) 1	
NO	2	GO
DK	8	TO
NA	.9	Q30

Q29a. Why do you think (he/she) was suspended?

_____ (118-119)

_____ (120-121)

_____

Q30. (Has/Have) your child(ren) ever been expelled or sent to another school?

YES	(122) 1	
NO	2	GO
DK	8	TO
NA	.9	Q31

Q30a. Why do you think your child(ren) (was/were) expelled or sent to another school?

_____ (123-124)

_____ (125-126)

_____

Q31. How do you think staying here will affect how your child(ren) (does/do) in school?

_____ (127-128)

_____ (129-130)

_____

APPENDIX D

Mathematical Computations of Estimated Data

The estimated data was mathematically computed in the following manner:

Example: 89% of the family shelters responded. The data from this 89% shows there were 286 homeless children in grades K - 6 on October 20, 1988. Based on this information the following equation was set up to compute data for the 11% of the family shelters who did not respond:

1) $\frac{11\%}{89\%} = \frac{X}{286}$

2) $\frac{286 \times .11}{.89} = X$

3) $286 \times .11 = 31.46$

4) $\frac{31.46}{.89} = 35 = X$